

jolly sailor bold by hopphorn

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Billy Hargrove

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Summary:

He isn't afraid. Isn't scared of anything as he lifts a leg, swings it over the top of the railing and sits, eyes never leaving the man below.

"Harrington!"

A voice breaks through the silence and Steven feels like his mind is being pulled through mud. He knows the sound of his captain's voice. Knows he'll be scolded for not responding at the call of his name.

But a thought breaks through his consciousness, shatters his fears of reprimand.

Jump.

He doesn't even hold his breath.

jolly sailor bold

Author's Note:

[prompt on tumblr](#): After seeing some tags on one of your posts, I'm in need of some pirate!Steve & siren! Billy !!!

A trick of moonlight. That's what he tells himself while he stands at the helm of the ship, staring out at the water in the dark.

What he sees move in the water is simply a trick of moonlight. Nothing lingers so close to a ship in the middle of the night. Not even sharks. The entire ocean sleeps when the moon hangs high. A *fact* of the world.

But then one glimmer in the water turns to three. Four. Half a dozen, until Steven's heart is racing in his chest, crying out in fear. The fear of a child, a boy, who believes in ghost stories.

Here there be monsters.

The impulse to cry out catches in his throat and he stands frozen at the railing, his own breath so loud in his ears that it nearly drowns out the soft swell of the sea against the ship. Any sane man would flee, but he cannot. He's hypnotized by the shimmer of something moving through black water. Something light, something shining.

In those fleeting moments, where he hardly remembers his own name, his mind conjures up one word.

Mermaid.

He knows the legend. He's heard the stories since he was a small boy, grabbing at his mother's skirts while men spoke in hushed voices. Faces white, shaken. Eyes wide.

Demons they'd said.

Demons with the faces of angels.

It was the only story of the sea that had kept Steven awake at night. All the others – the tales spoken by the haggard and weather-beaten sailors that wander into his family's inn for shelter – hadn't ever truly frightened him. Not like the tales of one particular beast.

Mermaids. Sirens. Nymphs.

Called many names, but one in the same.

Some men claim it begins with a trick of the ear. A sound or song so sweet, so alluring, that men were driven to walk right off their ships. Fall to their deaths in the mighty jaws of the ocean.

Others claim the monsters had faces. *Beautiful* faces, like their songs. Angelic yet deadly, they would lure men away from their posts, render them helpless at the single glance of a pretty face.

Some say their faces are a sight to behold above the water. But once beneath the surface of the ocean, a sailor will know his true fate. That is when he will know the demon under the beautiful disguise. Some men speak of fangs, long and dripping with thirst. Some speak of yellow eyes, split by diamonds, like a snakes. But the universal truth is this: if you meet a mermaid on the high sea, cover your ears, keep your eyes down and pray. Or you weren't long for this world.

It had always scared him.

But in his adulthood, it'd never occurred to him that the stories were *real*.

He's always believed in what he can see in front of him. Like the wind and the tide. If the sea leaves the shore, it will return. Because it does every day. If incoming wind is warm, and the sea is cold, a storm will follow the breeze.

These are facts. And Steven likes facts.

He's never counted on a legend, a myth, being fact. Then again, that's the whole idea behind a story, he realizes.

They're fantastic. Unbelievable. Until you see. Until you *know*.

Then you believe.

Just as he believes – as he stands, clutching the wood railing so hard his nails dig into water-worn cedar – that what he's witnessing circle his ship is not a shark. Not a dolphin or whale.

"Mermaid." He says aloud, letting the word wheeze from between his lips, chilling his flesh to the bone. It would take nothing more than a shout. A yell of alarm. And the whole of the ship would be awake, racing to his aid.

Yet he says nothing. He stares, watching as the it moves closer the surface of the water. Close enough he sees a shape. A figure, with arms. A long, lean torso and silvery tail.

If he weren't holding onto the ship, Steven knows his knees would no longer be holding his weight. He leans forward against the rail, looking hard down at the water.

The creature breaks the surface with a quiet splash, and the world seems to go silent as Steven braces himself with a soft gasp.

The face staring up at him, the *man* staring up at him, isn't beautiful. He's *breathtaking*. Steven knows he's seen no one with such a visage. Such *striking* features. Even from a significant distance, Steven trembles at the elegance of the man's face.

He doesn't move. Merely strokes his arms back and forth across the surface of the water as he gazes skyward, studying Steven with a blank expression. Calculating. Measuring Steven's face in the same fashion that Steven admires his.

There's a brief moment, in the many that Steven spends gazing at this gorgeous creature, that he remembers he's in danger. That men *warn* of this. This spellbinding stare. This trance. But as if it were smoke, the thought is gone from his mind in a breath and he's left with only a floating awareness as he watches the creature swim alongside the ship.

He isn't afraid. Isn't scared of anything as he lifts a leg, swings it over the top of the railing and sits, eyes never leaving the man below.

“Harrington!”

A voice breaks through the silence and Steven feels like his mind is being pulled through mud. He knows the sound of his captain’s voice. Knows he’ll be scolded for not responding at the call of his name.

But a thought breaks through his consciousness, shatters his fears of reprimand.

Jump.

He doesn’t even hold his breath.

Through a fog of shouts, startled voices, he is aware of nothing but the whistle of the air as he falls. Blissfully.

The water is *cold*.

It strikes at him like a slap to the face, makes him shriek in pain when it fills his clothes, his mouth. He flails beneath the surface, fighting with his own sluggish mind to fight for the surface.

Then he is suddenly gulping down air, coughing hard against the harsh drag of salt water in his throat. It sits bitter on his tongue, stinging in his eyes. He sputters for some time, his arms and legs throbbing with pain, the impact singing across his skin.

It’s only when he’s being pulled through the water that he remembers he’s not alone and he shouts in alarm, pinwheels uselessly against a firm hold.

When his vision clears, he goes utterly still.

“Please.” He manages to whisper before terror robs him of any further speech.

The creature is even more beautiful up close. So stunning that Steven wonders if such a man could ever truly exist. If such a handsome face could ever be a human reality.

Golden-haired, with plush lips and rounded nose. Eyes bright and wide, framed with dark lashes. Cheeks colored with a touch of pink.

The creature is captivating.

Holding him by the front of his shirt, the merman is keeping him afloat against the rock of the sea, his expression is as unyielding as his grasp. He stares, eyes flickering across Steven's face, following the open and close of his lips. His gasps for air.

"Please don't kill me." Steven manages to beg. He can hear shouts from above, the sound of commotion. Surely the crew is assembling for a rescue. Surely they wouldn't leave him to *die*.

"Harrington." The creature speaks and Steve shudders, like the man's voice had stroked him from the inside. Thick and deep and smooth as velvet, he sounds like a fantasy. A dream.

"Steven." He whispers. His own voice sounds whiny in comparison to the silky sound of the merman's timber. "Please."

The man blinks, lashes batting around his icy blue eyes as he stares down at Steven's mouth. Watches it intently.

"Steven." He repeats, lips forming the name with such deliberate movement, such *study*. Then he's gazing into Steven's eyes. Unchecked, unabashed, as he moves so close that Steven can feel his cool breath against his face.

The creature smiles.

And Steven's blood runs cold.

Fangs. Long and gleaming in the moonlight, they sit against the creature's pretty pink lips. Nothing more than teeth, in a smile, but Steven can't breathe as he imagines why a creature like *this* would need such teeth.

But whatever fear he may have had vanishes when the creature closes his lips. Offers a softer, sweeter sort of smile.

Then, in a moment, he's gone.

Steven kicks in the water, looks around wildly for any sign of him.

“Harrington!” His name rings out in the night and he glances up as a rope appears, landing only a few feet from where he floats. Blinking into the dark, he swirls round and round, looking for any sign.

But he is alone. Alone and surrounded by nothing but ocean.

When he grabs the rope, his weight is pulled easily from the cold water and he shivers. Holds tight until the thread of the rope burns against his palms. As he is lifted, he casts a glance back into the water.

A trick of moonlight. That’s what he tells himself as the surface shimmers.